

Pennsylvania's Historic Preservation Plan

Partnerships and Public Outreach

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, which also acts as the state historic preservation office (SHPO), in partnership with Preservation Pennsylvania, Inc., the statewide nonprofit historic preservation organization, recently undertook a year-long public outreach to update the Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Plan. The process, as Elizabeth Waters, the plan's consultant, often stressed, was as important as the product.

As the millennium approached, Brenda Barrett, the deputy historic preservation officer and director of the Bureau for Historic Preservation, thought it was time to mount a plan revision effort worthy of the occasion. This coincided with several statewide public and private studies, including Governor Tom Ridge's *21st Century Environment Commission Report*, the 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania's *Costs of Sprawl in Pennsylvania* report, and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources study, *Heritage Tourism in Pennsylvania*. These studies identified sprawl as a major threat to Pennsylvania's continuing economic growth and quality of life, noted sprawl's adverse impact on Pennsylvania's cultural her-

itage, and reported that heritage tourism contributes significantly to Pennsylvania's economy—\$5.35 billion in 1997.

The Right Time

Launching an all-out public outreach effort on the cusp of the millennium seemed most opportune. What better time to find out the preservation priorities of Pennsylvanians—to ask them what preservation policies they want to see realized, what historic resources they want preserved, what are the biggest threats to preservation of their communities? However, before these questions could be answered, we had to get organized; in other words, to plan the plan.

The Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Plan Advisory Committee

As the major reason for this initiative was to seek out public opinion, our first step was to call on prominent leaders from a wide spectrum of backgrounds and interests to be forthright about their opinions regarding historic preservation. With full support from Governor Tom Ridge's office, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission appointed the Historic Preservation Plan Advisory Committee. The committee's 14 members included state legislators; leaders of local, state, and national preservation nonprofits; a prominent archeologist; a noted architect; several CEOs; and representatives of the governor's office.

Initial meetings of the Advisory Committee resulted in some excellent recommendations, including the suggestion to make the preservation plan an attractive publication rather than a bureaucratic report, something easy to read and to the point. The Advisory Committee and the SHPO recognized that, for the preservation plan to have any meaning and become a useful tool, an all-out effort had to be made to find out what Pennsylvanians were concerned about. The Advisory Committee also urged us to involve school-age children in the historic preservation

The Meadville Market House, as interpreted by an elementary school student.



plan process—they wanted to hear from all Pennsylvanians.

A Historic Preservation Convocation

Before launching any public forums, the Advisory Committee agreed to organize an all-day convocation of preservation professionals and advocates invited to identify issues that would be taken to the public forums as “talking points.” The convocation was held March 1999, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, attracting 175 participants from across the state. It highlighted specific themes and issues: for example, historic preservation creates attractive communities, is a form of economic development, and is a way to tell Pennsylvania’s unique story. Also noted was the need for preservation to become a mainstream approach and, to make that a reality, education, public awareness, and government training had to occur.

Participants were asked to identify priority initiatives at the state, regional, and local levels for the next five years. At the local and regional levels of government, convocation attendees said, historic preservation must be incorporated into municipal comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances; and technical assistance to local governments and preservation nonprofit organizations needs to be increased. Attendees also noted that the statewide network of preservation organizations needs to be strengthened. Everyone agreed that the preservation constituency needed to be broader and more multicultural. It was remarked at the convocation, as well as at all public forums, that historic preservationists should adopt some of the strategies successfully employed by the environmental movement.

“Educate, educate, educate” was the major refrain heard throughout the day. “Time is of the essence—take action now,” we were told. “Create a sense of urgency; publicize the loss of irreplaceable historic resources.”

Launching the Planning Effort

To help us launch the plan we invited a class of fourth graders from the city of Harrisburg to present their drawings of historic sites they wished to preserve. At a news conference held in the capitol rotunda on December 17, 1998, under the festooned lights of a huge Christmas tree, the children presented their drawings to a William Penn re-enactor before an assembly of state officials. After briefly explaining their artwork, the children put them into a large gift-wrapped box as their gifts to the preservation

plan. It was a festive occasion and an auspicious way to launch the preservation plan public outreach.

Promoting the Plan: News Events

With the able assistance of the agency’s press secretary, news releases were mailed to all news media in the state and media in our public forum locations were personally contacted. To generate interest and participation in the preservation plan and boost attendance at the public forums, we organized press conferences and invited the media to join us on tours or visits to historic sites in each of the public forum localities. Our local preservation partners took the opportunity to discuss current preservation issues affecting their region or community. We were also fortunate, due to the advance work of our press secretary, to meet with several editorial boards. This proved highly useful in that we were able to explain the preservation ethos to local newspapers that had little or no familiarity with it.

The Public Forums

The difficult decisions we had to make were how many public forums to organize and where and when to hold them. Pennsylvania is a large, essentially rural state, with a staggering 2,568 local governments. We knew we wanted to hold public forums in our two largest cities—Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, approximately 400 miles apart—but what about the in-between places? We wanted as broad a representation of public opinion as possible. We did our best to choose sites accessible to local residents where organizations were willing to help organize and publicize our meetings. The result was 13 locations spread out across the state. Without the assistance of our local partners we could not have managed as many public forums.

Working with our statewide nonprofit organization as a major partner and with local preservation organizations was crucial, not only for practical reasons, but also to strengthen the preservation network throughout Pennsylvania. It is clear that in order for the plan to work, Pennsylvania’s historic preservation organizations and historical societies must be strongly committed to the plan from the beginning.

How We Held Our Public Forums

Public forums were held weekdays in the early evenings. Attendance was free, and we served refreshments. We invited the public to bring along their children and provided games and other quiet distractions for them, or urged

them to join in the open discussions. In Erie, for example, we held our public forum at one of our state agency's sites, the Maritime Museum at which is berthed Admiral Perry's flagship, *Niagra*. The educational department of the museum contacted the Conneaut Lake Elementary School whose students, like the children in Harrisburg, presented their artwork depicting historic sites they wanted to see preserved.

We introduced the meeting by explaining the importance of a preservation plan to help guide our agency and Preservation Pennsylvania in fulfilling our mandates as preservation organizations. We provided the meeting participants with the background of our previous plans and asked them to respond to three questions:

- What historic resources in their communities did they want to see preserved for future generations?
- What are the threats to those historic resources?
- Could they identify solutions to those threats?

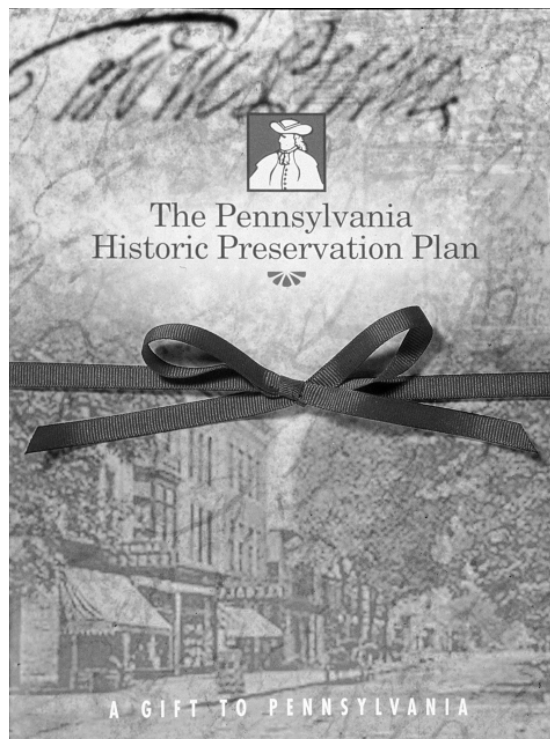
Answers to these questions, along with responses to the questionnaire distributed at the forums and mailed along with the forum brochures, provided us with the basis for the preservation plan.

People who attended these forums were generally well informed and obviously had thought long and hard about many of the issues. Their recommendations were succinct and clear, and generally reflected the opinions and recommendations of convocation participants.

What People Told Us Was Wrong

Although it is impossible to draw precise boundaries among regions in Pennsylvania, with its distinct political, economic, historical, and cultural differences, people who attended our public forums identified many similar issues and concerns. Meeting participants unanimously agreed that ignorance of history—Pennsylvania history in particular—and of historic preservation was prevalent throughout the population. Additionally, they identified the influence of real estate brokers, contractors, and builders and their lack of appreciation for historic buildings and environments as inimical to the preservation of historic neighborhoods.

People identified certain attitudes as counterproductive to preservation; for example, the view that the environment and everything in it as disposable, constantly reinforced by "new is better." The perception of urban centers as dens of



crime is perpetuated by news media, which reinforces a negative attitude about cities and towns. People also noted the extremes of opposing views: private property rights advocates on one side and historic preservation zealots on the other.

People were concerned about the lack of historic zoning in their communities and lack of enforcement of existing regulations. People complained of the fragmentation of government authority and of the sovereignty of municipalities, and criticized the lack of statewide regulations mandating regional planning. Meeting attendees from rural areas identified sprawl as a real threat to the viability of their traditional communities.

Proposed Solutions

Attendees identified a wealth of strategies for dealing with problems. The following are just a few of the most common.

- Get the historic preservation message out—publicize, educate, and train.
- Include Pennsylvania history and archeology as part of the elementary and secondary school curriculum.
- Wage a long-term public education campaign by employing the Internet, the news media, public access cable television, and long distance learning.
- Provide examples of preservation successes.
- Increase coordination between state agencies and preservation organizations.

- Local governments and communities should share their preservation knowledge and avoid competing for the same resources.
- State agencies should abide by the Pennsylvania History Code.
- Amend the Municipalities Planning Code to clearly incorporate historic preservation language and an anti-sprawl policy.
- Support incentives for historic preservation, including tax credits for historic rehabilitation of commercial and residential properties.
- Use a carrot-and-stick approach to strengthen laws to protect archeological resources.

An Agenda for Action

The culmination of our public outreach targeted three main areas of concentrated effort, which have become the Plan's goals:

- Educate Pennsylvanians about our heritage and its value.
- Build better communities through preservation.
- Provide strong leadership at the state level.

The *Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Plan: A Gift to Pennsylvania* was published in December 1999, and has been widely distributed. Copies have been mailed to all state legislators, it has been distributed through statewide government associations, and is available in state libraries. The plan can also be accessed through the web at <www.phmc.state.pa.us>.

In the forthcoming years, the fulfillment of the Plan's goals will be a collaborative effort undertaken by state agencies, Preservation Pennsylvania, local governments, legislators, preservation organizations, historical societies, and all those concerned with the preservation of our cultural heritage and economic well being.

Michel R. Lefevre is the Coordinator of Community Preservation for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), where he administers the Certified Local Government Program. He coordinated the development of the Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Plan.

Illustrations courtesy Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Vincent R. Shigekuni

The Kaho`olawe Use Plan

Non-traditional Planning for Traditional Use

The island of Kaho`olawe is located in the Hawaiian island chain just southwest of the island of Maui. It is one of the eight major islands of Hawai`i, but unlike most, it has experienced limited development. The island was used in the 1800s to early 1900s for the ranching of sheep, cattle, and goats. With the outset of World War II, the United States military took over all use of the island to train for air and sea attacks as well as to train for marine landings. During the military period, almost every type of ordnance, other than chemical and nuclear weapons, has been fired at, dropped on, or detonated on the island.

During the early years of the 1970s, a number of Hawaiian residents called for the halting of the bombing. In 1976, a small group of Native Hawaiians representing the Protect Kaho`olawe

`Ohana illegally landed on the island in protest of the bombing. Several illegal landings on the island soon followed, gaining widespread support among both Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians.

Finally, in 1990, then President Bush ordered a temporary halt to all bombing and munitions training. This act is considered one of the first great successes of the modern Hawaiian rights movement. Three years later, the United States Congress returned the island of Kaho`olawe to Hawai`i under the Defense Appropriations Act of 1993. This legislation requires the U.S. Navy to complete an environmental remediation program in 10 years. Hawai`i designated the island and its surrounding waters to two miles out as the Kaho`olawe Island Reserve and restricted the use of the Island Reserve to: